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Rural Tourism - Alternative to the Development of Rural Areas

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Abstract

Rural tourism through its content and its features is a distinct component in the economy of a region, and the sustainable, efficient use of local tourism resources can be an extremely important activity by: adding added value, boosting productivity, employment and increasing the living standard of the population. Rural tourism is considered a lever to mitigate local imbalances and besides attracting touristic areas in the circuit, it also has consequences on territorial development: housing construction, road development, development of public services and the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. Consequently, rural tourism has an impact on a country's economic and social development strategy, but also on a branch level.

Keywords: *rural tourism, rural space, sustainable development, tourism product.*

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is a phenomenon that has developed over time. It has been practiced in a spontaneous or relatively organized manner, but in the last period it has gained a special extension, in line with the development of the urban phenomenon, with the increasing possibilities of circulation and the financial resources of the population. [6].

Existing studies [1, 11, 16, 2], have shown that rural tourism is an economic activity, but at the same time it is a way of preserving the natural

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and human qualities of a geographic space [10, 3, 7]. Rural tourism is a way of education, but also of raising the quality of life for those who practice this form of tourism [12, 8, 14, 10].

2. Theoretical Background

Existing studies [1, 11, 16, 2], have shown that rural tourism is an economic activity, but at the same time it is a way of preserving the natural and human qualities of a geographic space [10, 3, 7]. Rural tourism is a way of education, but also of raising the quality of life for those who practice this form of tourism [12, 8, 14, 9].

At present, the socio-economic realities of our country are such as to allow the development of this form of activity in a systematic and organized manner. This is particularly significant since the promotion and development of rural tourism can be a way of solving some of the many difficulties that are implicitly felt in rural areas. It consists mainly in shaping interesting, attractive and accessible touristic offers and in a series of beneficial changes that this phenomenon can generate in the specific space of deployment.

3. Argument of the paper

For tourism in rural areas, there is no unanimously accepted definition, but a range of approaches and analysis perspectives are identified that give it a specific character. Thus, rural tourism includes all the tourist activities that take place in the rural area or, according to the LEADER axis (NRDP 2014-2020), it represents the total of the rural tourism activities. [4] Rural tourism is a form of tourism focused on destinations in the rural area, which has a functional structure of accommodation and other heterogeneous services [15] or it is an activity carried out and led by the local population and based on the local natural and anthropic potential [4]. At the same time, rural tourism is an activity that allows the recreation of man in his free time, spending a few days away from home, based on the economic, cultural life of the villages and the rural landscape[13].

4. Argument to support the thesis

Rural tourism is considered a lever to mitigate local imbalances and besides attracting touristic areas in the circuit, it also has consequences on territorial development: housing construction, road development, development of public services and the development of small and medium-

sized enterprises. Consequently, rural tourism has an impact on a country's economic and social development strategy, but also on a branch level.

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

Formulated by the World Tourism Organization, the definition of rural tourism is based on the following specific features that characterize the activities of this type of tourism:

- location in rural areas;
- building the tourist product functionally, based on the characteristics of the rural world (open space, low population density, contact with nature, tradition, variable number of households - usually distributed, traditional and traditional practices, important agricultural or forest areas);
- rurality (in terms of buildings and facilities - usually small scale - preserving rural infrastructure);
- traditional character (slow and organic growth in relation to local families
- keeping in mind the preservation of rural functionality and the preservation of rural life);
- diversity of forms of presentation depending on: rural and economic environments, historical and settlement (preserving the specific cultural identity).

The preoccupations to define rural tourism are relatively heterogeneous and have their source in the interest of various categories of specialists: sociologists, economists, geographers, land specialists, psychologists, etc. In this context, with regard to the definition and content of the concept of rural tourism, different definitions of rural tourism were defined:

- from a psychological point of view: rural tourism can be defined as a particular form of tourism based on a certain "art" of receiving the tourist and behaving differently from that usually practiced in other types of tourism. Thus, rural tourism is a "state of mind" that involves both hospitality from the rural community and respect for the countryside by the tourist.
- from a sociological point of view: rural tourism is practiced in the places where the tourist discovers the peasant, the rural folklore, the traditional holidays, etc. Rural tourism must remain a product of rural society; the development of space, the

implementation of recreational equipment must be done by the rural community itself, the only one able to create an atmosphere in which the tourist can discover a traditional way of life.

- from a geographical point of view: rural tourism is defined as the form of tourism that manifests itself in rural areas, regardless of its physical-geographical and demographic characteristics.

Rural tourism defines all rural offerings that are not necessarily linked to peasant farms. The rural character is emphasized, first of all, by the desire of tourists to know rural traditions, culture and nature, to spend their free time in an authentic rural environment where they seek quietness, clean air and want to practice sports and hiking.

Rural tourism can be defined as the type of tourist activity associated with the rural environment, managed in an adequate way ensures the perenniality of the rural space and the convergence of the economic and spiritual interests of the tourists and tourist clients.

The tourist product presents a complex structure manifested in various combinations of the elements (accommodation, food, transport, reception, animation, landscape quality, excursions, balneary treatment) practiced and dosed according to demand. There are two types of elementary elements: Primary: including accommodation, food and transport and, respectively, secondary or auxiliary: reception, animation, recreation, sports activities, recreation, balneotherapy, etc.

The tourist product must combine the components and the environmental circumstances. The tourist product may have a narrower range, limited to the basic components (transport + accommodation, accommodation, accommodation + meal) if the tourist has the guarantee of practicing activities of choice in the proximity aspect which actually condition the sale of the accommodation (nature walks, horseback riding, Swimming, fishing). The offer palette can be adequately amplified (accommodation + halfboard, accommodation + full board, transport) when the attractiveness of the auxiliary components (various forms of recreation, balneotherapy, landscape quality) is certain, easy to generate and concretises in shaping a well-defined tourism flow in terms of quantity.

Rural tourism comprises three basic elements:

Rural space - represents an ensemble given by the existence of a natural geographic landscape, which a community has developed, preferably balanced, to ensure the continuity of life. This symbiosis is the framework in which the rural tourism product has been shaped. The diversity of rural space is given by: dwelling architecture and building materials, the function of settlements (rural settlements with predominantly agricultural functions,

agro-industrial functions, agro-tourist settlements, agro-forestry, agro-fisheries).

Rural communities - are small and allow for the creation of friendly relations between members and tourists with the locals to the proximity of the family type, the sharing of experiences being a cultural gain on both sides but not excluding potential conflicts.

Tourism products - includes basic components (accommodation, public catering and transport) and auxiliary components (balneotherapy, recreation, sports activities, farm activities).

Implications of rural tourism on the development of Romanian rural areas

Despite the fact that at present rural tourism has a low share in the tourism market, its growth tendencies are obvious and thus can have positive effects on rural socio-economic life. Thus, rural tourism can bring about labor-force mutations by encouraging and financing new types of activities that can add vitality to poor and perfectible economic conditions.

The development of tourism thus engages a multitude of components with stimulating and stimulating effects, both of the tourism industry and of other branches of the economy that participate directly or indirectly in the process of economic growth.

From an economic point of view, rural tourism is an alternative to the development of rural areas due to the following considerations:

- Stabilization of the population through employment is an extremely important consequence for most rural areas generally confronted with the phenomenon of depopulation, especially as a result of the lack of a certain material prospect for the inhabitants. The supply of cash from tourist benefits can help preserve jobs in services such as trade, tourist accommodation, local transport, healthcare. They can bring additional income to farmers, forest workers, fishermen. Even if job preservation is less attractive than creating new jobs, it can contribute to the viability of rural communities, especially marginal ones, who do not benefit from the effects of urban polarization. A series of studies conducted in rural areas in Western Europe have confirmed the role of tourism in preserving jobs and diminishing the depopulation phenomenon.

- The creation of new jobs is possible given that the local implementation of rural tourism is successful. The creation of jobs is mainly associated with hotel and restaurant practices, but in the alternative, their success creates perspectives for enhancing activities related to trade in food and handicraft, transport, etc.

- Diversifying how to use the workforce. The vast majority of rural areas show a poor diversity in the use of almost full employment in the agricultural sector. Diversifying activities in a favorable economic environment can also bring about the stabilization of the rural population..

- Pluriactivity is another beneficial consequence of rural tourism. Ensuring the existence of farmers is done by providing additional activities (at least one), which complement the basic activity. Thus, a farmer may have the availability of renting rooms, providing some tourist services (guide, animator, ski monitor, etc.). Pluriactivity allows for additional revenue, both in the context of declining activity and in the constraints generated by the seasonal rhythm of agricultural activities.

- Promoting and developing services is an essential aspect because many rural communities are still struggling with the lack of appropriate service facilities. The additional demand for products due to the numerical growth of the clientele (including tourist) may allow the expansion of the commercial network, support for improvements to the area (road modernization, sewage, electrification, road and / or tourist signposting). In the case of isolated rural settlements that are not willing to provide and support certain types of services, rural tourism can help maintain their viability. Obviously, it is supposed that these settlements possess particular elements of tourist attraction, recognized as "branded" or unique items, and the tourist traffic phenomenon is stimulated and amplified by the optimal management of the tourist offer.

- Economic support for farmers is a major issue in economic and political environments. Numerous studies conducted in countries with rural tourism tradition have highlighted that farmers' average incomes can be increased by offering different forms of accommodation by promoting visits to agricultural farms that have different attractiveness (horse-riding, winemaking, vegetable growing, apiculture, etc.), by selling household-specific products, by increasing the share of female use in non-agricultural activities to In addition to the economic advantages that can encourage farmers to engage in tourism activities, the social advantages cannot be ignored: villagers can become better informed about a series of technical, legal, medical, economic issues, etc. which may have a favorable impact on their own socio-economic conditions.

- Promoting and supporting the folk art and local craft industry. Rural tourism can help these activities by recognizing their importance as well as by selling handicraft products. The weight, the degree of conservation and the originality of these activities present important contrasts at regional and national level. Our country is privileged from this point of view, given the enormous diversity and authenticity of rural artistic

creations. Festivals of folk art and craft production are ideal mechanisms that facilitate the marketing and promotion of rural tourism creation and outline the tourist attraction. Their existence, coupled with adequate media coverage, may be the first lever to ensure the inclusion of a rural settlement or region in the field of tourism activity.

- The rehabilitation of the urban heritage is realized in the conditions of the existence of a tourist flow, in two ways: first, preservation or restoration of objects of historical or cultural interest can be obtained by practicing access fees; secondly, the creation of an accommodation potential involves the restoration and restoration of abandoned buildings as a result of the depopulation phenomenon, the increase of comfort at the level of the houses that have available rooms for rent, the construction of the recreational infrastructure. In the long run, these initiatives are beneficial to the community itself as the beneficiary of the investments made. They diminish the younger generation's relocation motivations and may help return "emigrants" or even install new people.

- Improving the use of female labor. The role of women in the rural community is generally relatively limited, the decisive role in providing direct productive activities to men. The implantation of rural tourism in rural areas offers the opportunity to value the insufficiently used energy and talent of the female population.

- Attracting new investments. Direct involvement to support agriculture and services from budget funds is indispensable, but not always sufficient. Rural tourism is a potential way in itself, but it also has the advantage of acting in the direction of opening up new investment prospects. Tourism implicitly brings together people from different backgrounds. Potential rural tourists can include business people who have the ability to grasp more quickly the prospects of new activities, as well as financial possibilities, which can be beneficial by their effects on the community itself. Obviously keeping pleasant memories of rural holidays can encourage business people to start investing in the environment.

5. Conclusions

Tourist activities in rural areas generate positive effects and some advantages, among which we can list:

- rural tourism creates a good local valorization of the natural and cultural potential, contributes to the increase of the number of jobs both in the tourism sector and in other auxiliary services, services and management of local resources;

- contributes to raising the standard of living and education of the rural population and maintains the local population in the area, preserving traditional occupations;
- stimulate the adjacent activities: restaurants, transport network, craft activities, guides services;
- diversify the local economy through non-agricultural activities, especially where agriculture has no opportunities for development;
- boosts the rural economy through an additional demand for agricultural products;
- rural tourism favors intercultural understanding between rural residents and tourists;
- raising the interest of the population for environmental protection, by raising awareness of the importance of preserving natural areas.

Rural tourism is an economic activity that in recent years has witnessed significant growth as tourists' wishes to escape from crowded and polluted cities and spend their holidays in rural areas with numerous natural and man-made resources. For these tourists, rural tourism is a good alternative to holidays in coastal areas or cultural cities and a real opportunity to get to know the culture of rural areas better and to get closer to the traditional way of life.

On the other hand, the migration of the rural population to the city, the modernization of labor in the agricultural sector, the changes caused by the increase of the competition in the rural world by widening the free community market have a counterweight in the development of rural tourism. However, rural tourism activities can revive economically the villages, contribute to the modernization of infrastructure, attract different investors, if the inhabitants of the rural areas adopt a favorable attitude, to be correctly received by the tourists who prefer this type of tourism, and if Local authorities are sufficiently involved in developing this profitable economic activity.

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